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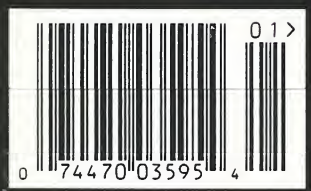
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WHO REALLY CALLED THE SHOTS
AND MADE THE MAJOR DOUGH?
PEEP THE STATS ON PAGE 139.



A CHANGE IS GONNA COME: Harlemites enjoy the block back in '66

UPTOWN MARAUDERS

MULTINATIONAL CORPORATIONS AND GIANT DEVELOPERS ARE FLOCKING TO HARLEM. BUT WILL THIS ECONOMIC MAKEOVER CHANGE THE COMPLEXION OF THIS HISTORIC 'HOOD?

WORDS BY ANGELA BRONNER

Harlem, New York, has a starry past. From its blocks, Marcus Garvey promised weary souls repatriation. Langston Hughes helped build a literary Renaissance. Billie Holiday headlined at the Cotton Club. Malcolm X personified militancy. Miles Davis twisted out be-bop at Minton's. And everybody from Stevie Wonder to James Brown pledged hard at the Apollo Theater.

Despite its historical significance, Harlem has suffered for decades. Economic factors, such as middle-class flight, deindustrialization and cutbacks in social programs have brought on years of poverty, crime, drug abuse and blight.

Today's Harlem is a mixed bag. It's ruff riders blazin' down Fifth. It's daughters of Africa perched on corners crooning, "Hair braided, miss?" It's the Studio Museum, dollar stores, weed and check-cashing spots. And since 1998, Harlem has been Starbucks.

Long a yuppie icon, Starbucks was one of the first upscale national franchises to open its doors Uptown. And in the last two years,

BET, Blockbuster Video, EAB Bank, Met Life, Pathmark, Sprint PCS and a \$65 million mall called Harlem USA have come to the neighborhood. To place the rapid development in perspective, few national chain stores existed Uptown two years ago. Harlem's business district was filled with vendors, McDonald's and mom-and-pop shops hawking gold, refurbished appliances and sneakers.

Reeking of what may prove to be gentrification, the changes are scorned by some and hailed by others. But many Harlemites fall somewhere in the middle, viewing the

business development—and the attendant white middle-class migration—with indifference. They're just happy to have some of the services that more affluent communities take for granted.

Besides being one of the most recognizable Black communities in history, the unique thing about Harlem is its proximity to the most expensive real estate in the country. As vacancies and affordable housing in Manhattan disappear, Harlem becomes ripe for gentrification.

Gentrification occurs when those on a lower income level are displaced by higher-income residents. It often begins with so-called urban renewal. Substandard buildings are demolished or remodeled to make way for housing developments and chain stores. Coffee bars, trendy restaurants, boutiques and other businesses follow, and the "character" of the neighborhood changes. With renewal comes an inflated real estate market and rents unaffordable to longtime residents. Most often, gentrification changes the face—and faces—of neighborhoods from Black and brown to white and money green.

In recent years, a number of 'hoods have undergone urban renewal. Chicago has a demolition plan for Cabrini-Green that has attracted condo construction, a gourmet supermarket, Blockbuster and Starbucks to the housing project's perimeter. Last year, the gentrification of Washington, DC's U Street



Starbucks invades 125th Street

POLITICS AS USUAL

corridor was aided by a government-backed housing lottery that offered abandoned homes for \$250. And in San Francisco, the once-grimy Mission District has become a haven for dot-com entrepreneurs.

Harlem is next, according to Randy Shaw, the founder of Housing America, a housing-rights organization. "There's no question they've been trying to gentrify Harlem for quite some time. And it's not very likely that an influx of high-income African Americans are going to Harlem. The new [residents] are overwhelmingly white."

In his 1999 book, *Harlem Ain't Nothin' But a Third World Country*, journalist

"UMEZ was created to spur economic [growth] in upper Manhattan and to create jobs," says Jim Simmons, the agency's senior VP of business development. "Based on the work that we do, I disagree with the assessment that we are aiding the gentrification of Harlem."

According to Simmons, UMEZ requires developers to invest in the community. For example, 75 percent of Harlem USA's employees must be upper Manhattan residents. Simmons also points to three job-training centers UMEZ has created and to a partnership with the Small Business Administration that will assist

ing that things will change, then I'd do it," he says. "But you'd have to guarantee it."

Altovise Robinson, a 27-year-old who works at Starbucks, has a simpler explanation: "It's about time we got *something*. [Harlem] is looking much, much better."

Indeed, Harlemites welcome the short-term benefits of renewal. For example, Stepp says he's ambivalent about his new neighbors but enjoys going to the Magic Johnson Theater instead of trekking downtown for a movie.

Housing advocate Shaw says these long-sought conveniences make urban renewal more insidious. "Twenty years have gone by



OLD TO THE NEW (clockwise from top left): New Edition live at the Apollo in the '80s; "urban renewal" at work; old Harlem; vintage Uptown girls; the new Old Navy; 1970 mobile concert; a game of chess.



Mamadou Chinyelu points out that folks who make \$75,000 a year comprise Harlem's fastest-growing population. So it's not just white folks moving Uptown, it's anyone who can afford \$5 cups of coffee. Like everything else in this post Civil Rights era, the new Harlem is a steaming cup of capitalism served with a double-dash of race and socioeconomics.

Less than a block away from Starbucks sit the offices of the Upper Manhattan Empowerment Zone (UMEZ), the agency responsible for most of Harlem's urban renewal. UMEZ offers companies dollars and tax breaks to invest in Harlem and neighboring Washington Heights. So far, the US government's \$300 million has been allocated for business development over a 10-year period. The brainchild of longtime Harlem congressman Charles Rangel, UMEZ is one of 14 similar programs across the country.

local entrepreneurs.

But Chinyelu says that UMEZ's strategy is nothing short of sinister. "Because we've been neglected for so long, we're attracted to these things that glitter. But at the end of the day, [corporations] are laughing all the way to the bank."

In late October, the New York-based Citywide Tenants Coalition protested gentrification by marching up 125th Street. Interestingly, most of the 250 participants were white, middle-aged activists and organizers. Orlando Green, a member of Student Liberation Action Movement who provided security for the march, attributes the lack of neighborhood participation to "psychological disempowerment. It goes back to living in an underdeveloped community. You don't feel like you can win."

Dominique Stepp, 23, watched protestors march down his block but didn't join them. "If you can guarantee that by march-

in some communities where the government has not been willing to adopt any of the proposals that the community wants for economic development," he explains. "At some point, it's like, 'God, we have to get something started.' Some of the residents feel there's no alternative to Starbucks."

Shaw, who battled gentrification in San Francisco's Tenderloin district, insists that there are alternatives. "The reason why the Tenderloin can't be gentrified is that so much of the land is off the market. Nonprofits control a very substantial portion of the land."

Without similar awareness, organization and action, Shaw says that historically Black 'hoods like Harlem will fall prey to gentrification. "Harlem's history doesn't mean it can't change," he cautions. "It's happened all over the country: Neighborhoods that used to have a certain connection to one ethnic group suddenly transform. And that's something that should alarm people." **S**